

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. In a computer network, a method for obscuring user requests for information comprising:

5 routing a user computer request for information, aimed at another network member, to a first cache memory;

if the first cache memory contains the requested information, returning the requested information in response to the user request without releasing the user request to the network member;

10 if the first cache memory does not contain the requested information, editing user identity information contained in the request, resulting in an edited request with obscured identity information;

releasing the edited request to the network member;

receiving the requested information from the network member; and

15 storing a copy of the requested information in the first cache memory such that user requests for information that can be satisfied by information stored in the cache memory are not revealed to other network members, and user requests that cannot be satisfied by the cache memory are obscured by editing prior to release to other network members.

20 2. The method of claim 1, further comprising the step of:

routing the edited request to a second cache memory prior to releasing the edited request to the network member; and

25 if the second cache memory contains the requested information, returning the requested information in response to the edited request without releasing the edited request to the network member.

3. The method of claim 2, further comprising the step of:

30 if the second cache memory does not contain the requested information, further editing the user identity information contained in the edited request prior to releasing the edited request to the network member.

4. The method of claim 1, wherein the computer network is the Internet.

5. The method of claim 4, wherein the user computer request for information is a Uniform Resource Locator (URL) reference string.

6. The method of claim 1, wherein the network member is a server computer.

7. The method of claim 1, wherein the first cache memory is resident on the user computer.

8. The method of claim 1, wherein the first cache memory is resident on a computer remote from the user computer.

9. The method of claim 1, wherein the editing is performed by the user computer.

10. The method of claim 1, wherein the editing is performed by a computer remote from the user computer.

11. In a computer network, a software program implemented in a computer system for obscuring user requests for information, said software program configuring the computer system to:

route a user computer request for information, aimed at another network member, to a first cache memory;

if the first cache memory contains the requested information, return the requested information in response to the user request without releasing the user request to the network member;

if the first cache memory does not contain the requested information, edit user identity information contained in the request, resulting in an edited request with obscured identity information;

release the edited request to the network member;

receive the requested information from the network member; and

store a copy of the requested information in the first cache memory

such that user requests for information that can be satisfied by information stored in the cache memory are not revealed to other network members, and user requests that cannot be satisfied by the cache memory are obscured by editing prior to release to other network members.

12. The software program of claim 11, further configuring the computer system to:

route the edited request to a second cache memory prior to releasing the edited request to the network member; and

if the second cache memory contains the requested information, return the requested information in response to the edited request without releasing the edited request to the network member.

13. The software program of claim 12, further configuring the computer system so that, if the second cache memory does not contain the requested information, it edits the user identity information contained in the edited request prior to releasing the edited request to the network member.

14. The software program of claim 11, wherein the computer network is the Internet.

15. The software program of claim 14, wherein the user computer request for information is a Uniform Resource Locator (URL) reference string.

16. The software program of claim 11, wherein the network member is a server computer.

17. The software program of claim 11, wherein the cache memory is resident on the user computer.

18. The software program of claim 11, wherein the cache memory is resident on a computer remote from the user computer.

19. In a computer network, a system for obscuring user requests for information comprising:

a user computer having a processor;

a server computer containing information sought by the user computer;

a first cache memory capable of storing information; and

a reference editing function capable of editing user identity information contained in a request for information,

wherein a request for information from the user computer, aimed at the server computer, is routed by the processor to the first cache memory, and

if the first cache memory contains the requested information, the requested information is returned in response to the user request without releasing the user request to the server computer; but

if the first cache memory does not contain the requested information, the first reference editing function edits user identity information contained in the request prior to releasing the request to the server computer, and upon receipt of the requested information from the server computer, the first cache memory stores a copy of the requested information

such that user requests for information that can be satisfied by information stored in the first cache memory are not revealed to other network members, and user requests that cannot be satisfied by the first cache memory are obscured by the first reference editing function prior to release to the server computer.

20. The system of claim 19, further comprising a second cache memory wherein the edited request for information is routed to the second cache memory prior to release to the server computer, and if the second cache memory contains the requested information, the requested information is returned in response to the edited request without releasing the edited request to the server computer.

21. The system of claim 20, further comprising a second reference editing function, wherein if the second cache memory does not contain the requested information, the second reference editing function further edits the user identity information contained in the edited request prior to releasing the edited request to the server computer.

22. The system of claim 19, wherein the computer network is the Internet.

23. The system of claim 22, wherein the user computer request for information is a Uniform Resource Locator (URL) reference string.

24. The system of claim 19, wherein the first cache memory is resident on the user computer.

25. The system of claim 19, wherein the first cache memory is resident on a computer remote from the user computer.

5 26. The system of claim 19, wherein the first reference editing function is resident on the user computer.

27. The system of claim 19, wherein the first reference editing function is resident on a computer remote from the user computer.